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# Taking Flight on the Dragon's Back: An Analysis of the Chinese Dragon as Monster and Symbol of Unattainable Power

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*Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look into an abyss, the abyss looks back into you.*

– *Friedrich Nietzsche,* Beyond Good and Evil

*If you ignore the dragon, it will eat you. If you try to confront the dragon it will overpower you. If you ride the dragon, you will take advantage of its might and power.*

– *Chinese Proverb*

**Abstract:**

Monsters are a universal phenomenon in human cultures, signifying the human social memory of predators as well as the human need for certain societal boundaries. The dragon is a monster that is almost universally portrayed in human societies around the world. The Chinese dragon, in particular, represents an anomaly in the studies of dragons, in that it embodies a beast of benevolence rather than malignance. However, the Chinese dragon still symbolizes the human desire for power and our fascination with danger, placing it firmly within the scope of monster theory and analysis.

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## Introduction

The Chinese call it *lung*, the Japanese say *tatsu*, the Welsh *draig*, the Germans *lindwurm*; it is *zmaj* to Croatians and Serbians, *unktena* to the Cherokee Indians of North America, and English speakers call it *dragon*.[1]

Legends of the awe-inspiring dragon have circulated humanity's memory since the beginnings of civilization. Theories about the origins of this great beast have been debated for centuries, mostly because variations of dragon iconography have manifested in cultures all around the world. What is it about the dragon that makes it so prolific in the human consciousness? It appears that the true commonality these cultures and their dragons share is the human mind itself.

One country famous for its reverence of the dragon is China. The Chinese people honor the dragon as a symbol of their country's longevity and their culture's perseverance; it also symbolizes good fortune and has a long been associated with the Chinese emperor. Compared to other dragon representations around the world, the Chinese dragon is generally viewed in a positive light, rather than as a symbol of terror or death, as it is often viewed in other cultures.

Overall, the Chinese dragon has positive cultural connotations, such as being known as a symbol of luck; however, this has not always been the case throughout Chinese history. Like many other monsters, the Chinese dragon's roots lie in human primal fears of predators and dangerous environments. To explain the symbol of the Chinese dragon solely as a figure of benevolence would be to reduce the symbol's expansive range, canceling out centuries of layered historical intricacies. The dragon not only represents benevolence, but also destruction, creation, and transiency. In other

[1] Paraphrased from David E. Jones' work (Jones 2-3).

words, the Chinese dragon is a very complex symbol indeed. All in all, the dragon represents the human fascination with danger and power – and their inherent tensions.

In this thesis, I examine the complexities of the Chinese dragon, revealing its many layers as both a positive and negative symbol in Chinese culture. In order to do this, I begin by analyzing the Chinese dragon in its greater context within the "monster" theoretical framework, since dragons are monsters on a foundational level. Through this comparative analysis with monster theory, I show how the Chinese dragon is a human construction that both reflects human desires for power and emphasizes our fascination with danger.

Throughout this analysis, I incorporate a variety of Chinese artworks in which there are depictions of the dragon; these artworks include early sculptural and decorative images as well as later ink paintings. Through this larger context of visual representation, I examine how the perpetuation of the dragon image throughout Chinese history circulates back to the human desire for power over nature and power over each other.

## Part 1: The Dragon as Monster

Before I examine the Chinese dragon in particular, I first need to establish what a dragon is on a broader level. As dragonologist Qiguang Zhao notes, "Dragons do not actually exist – none ever did exist. Nevertheless, beliefs in their actuality, ideas of their images, and descriptions of their activities have prevailed all over the world since antiquity, and have attained a certain reality through historic, literary, mythological, folkloristic, social, psychological, and artistic representations" (Zhao 1).

The dragon exists as an idea throughout many different cultures and traditions. Examples include: "the Dragon City…in Hanoi…in Iceland where the god Loki has associations with a female dragon; in the British Isles, there are dragon caves and dragon-haunted lochs; and in Hawaii, where all the dragons are descended from the mother goddess Mo-o-inanea, 'the self-reliant dragon'" (Zhao 1). Stories of dragons vary widely – sometimes portraying them as either intelligent or animalistic, and other times depicting them as a combination of the two.

In general, our first impressions of dragons conjure images of large, scaly, fire-breathing creatures with long grasping tails and razor sharp teeth. Usually, they live on the outskirts of society and become vicious predators when confronted by humans. Often, these dragons do not wait patiently for humans to find them; rather, they deliberately seek humans out as prey.

The European and American impressions of dragons are of frightening, repugnant, vicious creatures that lurk in dark places, hoard treasures that do not belong to them, and wait to ensnare the unwary in their vile grasp so as to consume them. This dragon is pure, unbridled physical power; a beast that threatens to demolish the fragile

foundations of human society with one swipe of its mighty tail. The East Asian perspective on dragons is much more optimistic, however. Those cultures attribute the dragon with luck, change, and the infinite. In many East Asian cultures, the dragon is a reoccurring figure in folktales and stories, and it is even associated with the highest status of government, the Emperor. The Chinese, in particular, infamously revere the dragon as a symbol of their country.

Because the dragon is viewed as a force of nature existing externally from human society, it carries with it the power to inspire awe and wonder, as well as fear. As a result, dragons can be categorized as "monsters". As such, analysis of dragons under the greater umbrella of "monster theory" can offer interesting options for insight. Jeffrey Cohen, in *Monster Theory*, explains that: "Monsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them" (Cohen 5). Although monster types vary both quantitatively and qualitatively between cultures, each society around the world has its own particular brand of historical monster. More so than other monsters, the dragon is unique because it is almost universally represented in human culture around the world, making it a symbol of not only one human social branch, but of greater humanity in general.

Essentially, monsters are recognized as constructions of the human consciousness inspired by the natural world. Physically and conceptually, monsters represent an amalgam of traits and ideas. The monster is never "created out of nothing, but rather through a process of fragmentation and imaginative recombination in which elements are extracted from various forms in nature and then reassembled as an entity that can then

claim autonomous existence in consciousness"[2]. Humans dissect and inventively reassemble parts of corporeal or conceptual threats and combine them into a new "animal", effectively creating a "monster".[3]

Because human monsters share certain universal traits, some scholars have argued that the creation of monsters begins in the human mind. David Gilmore, in his cross-cultural monster theory analysis, claims: "The similarities between diverse [monster] cultural traditions seem to point to some underlying commonalities in the human mind" (Gilmore 4). The "commonalities" Gilmore explains are derived from the way monsters physically combine human, animal, and environmental traits. Thus, in Gilmore's view, monsters reflect a compilation of factors that cause fear or anxiety, all wrapped up in a complete package.[4] Gilmore continues to say: "These commonalities are not only anatomical and pictorial, but also behavioral and moral – even dietary!" (Gilmore 4)

The most common trait monsters share is their presence as a threat to humans. Sometimes monsters are created from threats that are corporeal, other times they come from threats that are more conceptual. The main danger the monster presents to humans is its role as predator. Many cultures' monsters make sport of hunting humans for food[5]. They are especially scary for humans because they are cunning as well as strong, and are

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[2] Quoted in Gilmore (12), who is referencing Cohen (11), who in turn is referring to the work of Rene Girard, in *Violence and the Sacred*.

[3] The concept of monsters as animal forms that are dissected and reassembled is explored by multiple scholars: including, Girard (*The Scapegoat* 33), Cohen (6), Gilmore (7), and Davis and Santos (xi).

[4] Davis and Santos support this theory, applying it to a modern context in which the monster symbolizes a "challenge [to] the homogeneity of society and Self by revealing inconsistencies, gaps, and the unknown" (x). They also argue that the monster "speaks to real anxieties about our vulnerability in an age of rapid globalization" (xi).

[5] There's the Native American man-eating ice giant called the *Windigo*, which is portrayed as a superhuman, perfect hunter with an ice heart and a particular interest in taking humans back to its lair to snack on them slowly. The mythical Greek *Cyclops* from the Odyssey is another monster that took pleasure in butchering Odysseus' men in the night. The Old English, half-human giant *Grendel* from the legend of Beowulf is said to have had superhuman strength that he used to rip his human victims limb from limb before eating them. Many more examples can be found in Gilmore's text.

naturally endowed with the weapons to kill us. In our reassembly of different animal and human traits, we effectively create the perfect hunters of our own species.

Anthropologist David E. Jones provides an insightful approach to the reasoning behind the creation of predatory monster images. Looking at dragons in particular, Jones suggests that monsters originated from the ancestors of humans' fears of being hunted. In his analysis, *An Instinct for Dragons*, Jones argues that dragons are a product of our ancestors' encounters with prehistoric predators, and that the compilation of the dragon image is a result of our evolutionary instincts. After studying Vervet monkeys, Jones observes that these primates give alarm calls for three types of predators: raptors, leopards, and snakes. Because of our ancestors' behavioral similarities to these primates, Jones reasons that this same predator triad that the Vervet monkeys currently fear could have also inspired our creation of the dragon image.

According to Jones, this raptor/leopard/snake predator triad terrorized our early, smaller-stature ancestors. Jones claims these impulses[6] to avoid these three predators originated "about 35 to 50 million years ago, when ancestral primates evolved in the dangerous company of" these predators (Jones 38). These three predators present unique threats that we find particularly distasteful; we fear: being dropped from a great height (raptor), being lacerated or crushed (leopard), and being constricted or suffocated (snake). The dragon potentially possesses all three of these categories of offensive maneuvering.

[6] Jones explains that these impulses come from the development of the "reptile/mammal relationship [which] is…one of the most ancient predator/prey relationships in the animal world. The raptors evolved about 60 to 160 million years ago, at a time when the ancient rodentlike [sic] ancestors of the modern primates were experimenting with adaption to life in the trees, and the big cats evolved simultaneously with the ancestors of the modern tarsiers and lemurs." (38)

Jones' theory on the development of the dragon image explains that dragons, and monsters in general, are deeply rooted in our biology as well as in the natural world[7]. The basic primal fear of being eaten, thus, is the origin of human creation of monsters. Therefore, Jones' asserts that human fears of monsters developed in our psyches long before we even became what we would consider to be modern day humans. Instead of examining monsters as a part of our human evolutionary history, most monster scholars approach monsters as an established concept to be analyzed and deconstructed. One theory that has recurred throughout monster analyses is that monsters represent an archetypal "other" that threatens the order of society.

The establishment of order requires creating and enforcing certain boundaries, rules, and regulations. As Mary Douglas claims in her analysis *Purity and Danger*, order within society "is constructed only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against" (Douglas 4). In other words, order defines what "is" and what "is not", automatically creating the "other".[8] These definitions impose a "system on [the] inherently untidy experience" of life (Douglas 4). Within this system, humans thrive by "separating, demarcating and punishing transgressions" (Douglas 4).[9] Our ability to establish order and punish those who violate that order has allowed us to selectively eliminate parts of society that do not contribute beneficially to the society's whole. Our tendency to target and eliminate the "other", however, has also proven to be a detrimental factor as well throughout human

[7] This also explains how monsters like dragons are universally present in human cultures, despite the fact that many predators are only present in few locations. Jones argues that there is some variation of the raptor/leopard/snake predator combination present in all parts of the world, allowing for the human fears of these predators to be universal.
[8] Davis and Santos (x) discuss the monster as the "Other", as do Cohen (7) and Gilmore (16).
[9] A parallel to natural selection can be drawn here.

history. Therefore, our desire for order has contributed to the survival of our species, as well as constitutes a "fatal" human flaw.

The end goal of our social order is the longevity of our cultural traditions - the passing on of our genes and ideas to the next generation. For humans, the monster represents the transgressing factor that exists so as to prohibit us from attaining this longevity. As Joseph Campbell notes, in *The Power of Myth*, a monster is a "horrendous presence or apparition that explodes all of your standards for harmony, order, and ethical conduct" (Campbell 278). In other words, the monster is an antagonistic outsider whose goal is to destroy the foundations of human society.

Despite being the archenemy of society and order, the fact is that mythological monsters do not actually exist in physical reality. As Jones argues, it is possible that the dragon, and other monsters, have evolved from various types of animals and the physical threats they pose to humans. But, eventually the human mind evolved and the dangers of being hunted in the wild lessened by our creation of greater societies.

Art historian Heinz Mode makes the claim that the very first monsters started appearing contemporaneously with civilizations as well as literacy. He argues that: "the visual portraits of menacing creatures occur at precisely the same time as does literacy… as a product of the earliest known civilizations, in the period around 3000 BCE" (Gilmore 5). Gilmore expands on this idea, stating that it is even "more compelling…that the very idea of the monster springs up with the same aesthetic-intellectual impulse that gave rise to civilization itself" (Gilmore 5). This is particularly interesting, because the claim that monsters and civilization evolved together exposes the idea that, in order for society to function, it needs monsters. In other words, the human mind needs monsters.

Monsters become the enemy that society needs so as to maintain its semblance of order. They serve as the cathartic oppositional force that allows societies to collaborate and cohere, becoming the "disorder" to contradict the "order" of human society. Yet, their presence in various cultures also exposes those cultures' weaknesses. The very existence of these monsters exposes "the radical permeability and artificiality of all our classificatory boundaries, highlighting the arbitrariness and fragility of culture" (Gilmore 19). The presence of monsters in our social memory reveals our addictive dependency on order and routine.

As beings that represent the complete dismissal of boundaries, monsters reside in the "unmentionable" space of human culture. To exist between states of being is a dangerous, potent way of living, and thus this trait makes monsters both frightening and alluring for the human consciousness.[10] Monsters defy the rules of reality and society in many ways, and they are not bound by the same ethical or moral principles that constrain humans. Even in their appearance, monsters are physically defined by their collage-like quality, in that they distort and recombine extant animal and human traits. As Cohen notes, monsters are "disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" (Cohen 6). By fearing the destruction that could come from chaos, society is defined and inhibited by this fear.

[10] Davis and Santos introduce the concept of the "Monstrous Desires" in their section titled "Monstrous Desires/Clean Canvases: Pure and Impure Monsters" (111). This section of essays discusses monsters and sexual desires, in relation to abstinence and fetishes among other topics. For this analysis, I decided to forgo the connection between the Chinese dragons and sexual desires in favor of a more generalized discussion about the allure of power, rather than the sexual body. However, this area could be explored further in connection to Chinese folktales, in which dragons transform into a rogue men or women who sneak into their lovers' rooms at night for various secret romantic encounters.

As Mary Douglas asserts in her analysis *Purity and Danger*: "Order implies restriction…So disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realized in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite" (Douglas 94). Douglas continues: "Danger lies in the transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable" (Douglas 96). Our monsters are metaphors for the limitlessness of disorder, the infinite possibility of having no set pattern. Monsters represent this "undefinable" space in human culture; they are the antitheses of well-ordered human interactions with each other and with their surroundings. Monsters embody an existence without any type of boundaries; they are the personification of anarchy, which adds to their ability to inspire terror in the human consciousness.

We fear monsters because they exist without the necessary confines of order and society. However, we also envy monsters for this reason as well. Cohen notes: "The same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint" (Cohen 16-17). Therefore, the monster becomes a symbol for humanity's chaffing against its own necessary boundaries. The monster calls "horrid attention to the borders that cannot – *must* not – be crossed" (Cohen 13). Because these boundaries are forbidden, it makes them all the more enticing for humanity to want to cross them.

Laura Davis and Cristina Santos make the suggestion, in their edited compilation of *The Monster Imagined*, that: "Perhaps one of the reasons monsters fascinate and compel is that they are symbols of human vulnerability: we are all potentially vulnerable to violence" (Davis and Santos x). We are vulnerable because of our need for order and

our fear of disorder. We are doubly vulnerable because the danger we try to eliminate, in the form of the monster, is constantly changing and evolving with us. As Cohen notes: "the monster's body is both corporeal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift" (Cohen 5). However, it is the monster's ability to shift that also makes it so intriguing for humans. As Douglas notes, "We recognize that [disorder] is destructive to existing patterns [but it also]…has potentiality. It symbolizes both danger and power" (Douglas 94). This human attraction to danger and power is what drives the continual need for monsters in human society.

Monsters are the "other", the feared, and the indefinable: we create monsters as foes so as to be able to court this danger and power. Monsters are our inventive ways of pushing against the boundaries of everyday life. By envisioning and destroying monsters, we are able to step outside the confines of reality and society, temporarily joining the space of disorder. Monsters are the byproducts of civilized society, the tantalizing suggestion of disorder that accompanies and undermines order; they are also an example of human addiction to the possibility of danger and the desire to gain more power.

Because monsters do not exist within reality, we must also view them as a projected version of the human "self". As Davis and Santos note, the "monster can be conceptualized as a kind of mirror…[In that there is a] fine line between 'human' and 'monster,' between 'Self' and 'Other,' [that] makes the monster somehow even more alluring, and yet makes the Self more vulnerable to it" (x). The Davis and Santos continue to say: "in recognizing the 'monster' as the Other one is essentially recognizing the 'monster' in our self" (Davis and Santos xvii). In a sense, our fascination with monsters is because monsters represent a complicated mind game we play with ourselves.

No matter how many times we slay these monsters they will never disappear. Because, in reality, the monsters we are creating and destroying exist only within the confines of our own minds. We will always be plagued by our overwhelming fear of chaos and the unknown, as well as our inexplicable magnetism to the monster's destructive elements. We will continually need this threatening "other", in the form of monsters, so as to reestablish our communal understanding of society and order. Pierre Barsuire notes of monsters that: "they exemplify some moral or spiritual flaw" (Gilmore, quoted in Friedman 10). This is true, however the flaw is not in the world around us, but centrally located within ourselves.

As an example of a monster involved in this theoretical context, the dragon as a symbol is intrinsically and complexly tied to human nature and human thought processes. Like the general concepts of the monstrous suggest, the dragon represents our fears and presents us with our own mortality. As a monster, the dragon may have developed from our instinctual behavior or our need for order and fascination with disorder, or possibly a combination of both. As mentioned above, the symbol of the dragon exists in cultures all around the world. However, the Chinese dragon is a particularly complex version of a culture's interaction with its monstrous dragon.

As I continue with the analysis of monsters and the dragon, I will narrow my focus down to the Chinese dragon. Even though the general belief is that the Chinese see the dragon as a powerful, benign force, I will argue that the dragon in the Chinese culture represents a human recognition of danger and power, making it very much a monstrous being.[11] The Chinese dragon carries with it a "powerful sense of…something

[11] As Bates states: "The dragon has been the symbol of China since ancient times and for many centuries has been considered immortal and omnipresent…The Chinese dragon was considered to be exclusively a

momentous" (Gilmore 10). The dragon in its Chinese context challenges humans to wonder about where the authority rests in our interactions with each other and with nature. In the end, the Chinese dragon represents the irresistible draw humans have to unattainable power, and our interest in realistic and fabricated danger.

beneficent beast until the Buddhists introduced the view that there were also evil dragons – but the basic concept of a dragon in the mind of the populace was one of noble spiritual qualities that were unconquerable" (xii). This quote by Bates highlights the contrary Buddhist opinion of dragons as malignant, rather than benevolent, giving evidence of multiple interpretations of the dragon symbol in China. In this analysis, I discuss how the Chinese dragon still had a basis in fear and danger for early Chinese cultures, even before the Buddhists introduced the concept of the evil dragon.

## Part 2: The Dragon as Fickle Water God

In the context of monster theory, as well as international dragon theory, the dragon in East Asian cultures is usually given special treatment because it is considered to be an anomaly in dragon lore and symbolism. As argued by many scholars, the Chinese do not regard their "ancient nemesis…[as] a reptilian dragon-like being"; instead, "in China or any other Oriental civilization…[the dragon is] the genius of strength and goodness, having been appropriated by elites as an emblem of good fortune" (Gilmore 127). These scholars perpetuate the dragon as a symbol of benevolence, stating that: "In China the dragon as a symbol represents the spirit of fertility and therefore of life itself" (Gilmore 127). However, as mentioned in the previous section, the dragon's early origins in Chinese culture connect the symbol back to the human fascination with danger and power.

The first references to the dragon in early China closely tie it to the water cycle. Early human civilizations flourished next to steady water supplies, meaning they generally were located near a large body of water such as a lake or a river[12]. A major factor influencing early Chinese culture was their dependence on their agriculture, and therefore on the constant changes of the water cycle. Patricia Ebrey elaborates on the geography of China, which serves to emphasize the importance of this water tie to the early Chinese civilizations.

In her text *China*, Ebrey notes that "China proper extends over 1,000 miles north to south and east to west…This huge expanse of land is interlaced with mountain ranges,

[12] Water is the source of life; all animals depend on water to survive. While access to water on the ground was crucial for survival, water from above was also necessary. Growth of crops depends on a constant supply of irrigation water, as well as a substantial amount of rain. In the end, it is water that controls all environments, and those who live in them.

which separate the more habitable river valleys from each other. It was in these river valleys that the first human settlements were established" (Ebrey 12). Ebrey builds on this by stating that: "Chinese civilization has throughout history had a strong association with agriculture. The earliest stages of Chinese culture developed in river valleys in which crops could be cultivated even with primitive techniques" (Ebrey 11). As a result of these strong geographical influences, some of the earliest deities in China evolved from the Chinese people's relationship with the rivers and mountains.[13] Among these deities was the dragon, which came to be associated with the element of water.

Early Chinese civilizations understood the necessity and power of water, as both a life-giving and a life-taking element.[14] Roy Bates, in his analysis titled *Chinese Dragon*, notes that: "The common people believed that a dragon could move clouds around and bring rain. This belief was reinforced by the observation that the appearance of a dragon, of which there were many, was usually accompanied or followed by a great downpour" (Bates 20). In *An Instinct for Dragons*, David E. Jones mentions that there are many references to dragons "in the earliest Chinese literature, dating to 2700 B.C.", such as the "sightings" that preceded rainfall (Jones 7). Jones further elaborates on the connection between dragons and water, stating that these dragons "are associated with rain, soil fecundity, rivers, oceans, and floods…The worst floods were generally ascribed to a dragon's reaction to some sort of untoward moral behavior", most likely on the part of the ruler (Jones 7). Thus, early Chinese people worshipped the dragon as a spirit who

[13] Robert Eno discusses early Chinese deities from the Shang Dynasty (approximately 1600 – 1046 B.C.E.). Eno refers to these early deities as "Nature Powers", stating that these Powers "include a variety of naturally occurring phenomena that seem, in one way or anther, to be treated as deities in the oracle. texts…[The] most prominent figures [of the Nature Powers] sector of the [Shang] pantheon are the Powers He, or the River Power, and Yue, or the Mountain Power…The River and Mountain Powers [influenced the] weather and crops" (62-3)

[14] Zhao discusses the important relationship between the dragon and water, extensively referring to scholars who position the early Chinese culture as a "hydraulic despotic" society (95).

watched over the rivers and the rain, and they also feared the retribution of this spirit enough to recognize the need to seek its good favor through sacrifice and adoration.

As Bates mentions, "some dragons were known to be ill tempered [and there] were accounts of tiresome flood dragons that had to be tamed" (Bates 18). An example of a flood that occurred and was attributed to the antics of a dragon is "[when] the Zheng area [had] a flood…in 523 B.C." (Bates 20). This record, found in a book titled *Comments by Zuo (Zuozhuan)*, goes on to say, "The dragons were fighting in the deep pools of the Wei River outside the Shi Gate. The people of the country asked the ruler to make sacrifices to the dragons" so as to stop their fighting and cease the floods that were wreaking havoc to the people's land (Bates 20).

In some instances, when the ruler had to make a sacrifice to the dragon, "nubile young virginal girls…[were] thrown into lakes or drowned in the sea…as a present to the dragon to persuade it to…desist from some displeasing activity" (Bates 23). From records such as this one, it can be concluded that the Chinese people did not take the wrath of the dragon lightly. Irate dragons had the capacity to cause a lot of harm for early Chinese people, which the people dealt with accordingly – through providing offerings and sacrifices to appease the dragon's fury.

Angry dragons proved to be excellent subjects for later Chinese artists. Ink painter Chen Rong[15], in particular, attempted to depict the forms of dragons as they are locked in aggressive bouts with one another. As seen in this ink painting, titled *Five Dragons* (Figure 1), the artist portrays the dragons as viciously attacking each another. The dragons are caught in an aggressive frenzy; it is hard to trace where one ends and another

[15] Artist Chen Rong (1200-1266) was part of the "Fish and Dragon School", a school established in the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279) that taught artists to specialize in the arts of painting and drawing fish and dragons.

begins. They are knotted together: snapping, nipping, and biting each other in an endless roiling battle. It is difficult to discern if the waving bands of white light are lightning bolts or the dragons' whiskers. Overall, there is an atmosphere of frenzied, hurried movements and tension between the dragons.

When looking at this painting, one can almost feel the electric friction coming off of these dragons' bodies, and hear the thunder quaking the sky from the shock waves of their fury. The dragons in this painting are wild animals fighting for dominance, not at all the majestic creatures we are led to believe Chinese dragons represent. Rather than divinity and benevolence, these dragons are violent and animalistic. They have no qualms in ripping each other to shreds over an unknown quarrel. Their unchecked rage lowers them from divine deities to demons with wrathful eyes. Through this portrayal, it is easier to envision the Chinese dragon as a tempestuous deity capable of losing its temper in battle and its control over the elements while engaged in battle, consequently drowning the Chinese people's lands in floodwaters.

While the dragons could cause floods, they also were known from time to time to withhold water from the people. For instance, Bates elaborates on the dragon as the cause of droughts, stating: "In times of drought, the people made clay images of the dragon that they sacrificed…for the purposes of making rain…Invocations to the dragon for rain occurred for many centuries" (Bates 21). From accounts such as this one, it appears that the Chinese people grew to revere the dragon as a potent rain god from early on. However, records such as this one and the previous fighting dragons record display dragons not as benevolent creatures, but as volatile and impetuous spirits whose wills changed quickly and whose favors were never bestowed for very long. The dragon thus

represents a fickle water god whose good graces come with a price and whose retribution for crimes committed against it are swift and deadly.

Because water is cyclical and weather patterns are unpredictable, the dragon symbolized for these early Chinese civilizations natural forces that could not be defined or controlled. This uncontrollable, yet all encompassing, dragon water deity proved the only being that could hold leverage over the ruler, since it wielded the power to create or destroy life and determine who had the right to rule through utilizing its power over water. Qiguang Zhao, in *A Study of Dragons, East and West*, expands on this notion, saying: "the Chinese dragon as a water god implies esoteric qualities such as authority, harmony, good omen, emperorship, fertility, and cultural identity" (Zhao 9). The counterpoints to these qualities, however, meant discord, bad omens, loss of power, infertility, and cultural obliteration.

As a result, these records lead to the conclusion that dragons, for the early Chinese people, represented powerful beings that dictated the fertility or infertility of the land and the people, as well as serving as a harbinger of good or bad fortune. In this light, the Chinese dragon embodies danger as well as security, a lack of power as well as a wealth of power. While the dragon could represent a benign power when its temper was appeased, it could also change its mind on a whim and without notice, leaving death and destruction in its wake without any clear reason for this rapid switch of temperament. Such dragons for early Chinese people represented a metaphysical threat that lived outside of the boundaries of human society, but that also played a vital role in society's interaction with its environment and established order.

As portrayed by these records, the early Chinese dragon was more along the lines of a monstrous god than benevolent being. It posed a considerable threat to the civilizations, through their control over the element of water. The Chinese dragon represented a force of nature that was out of the control of humanity, and therefore a parallel can be drawn between the Chinese dragon and the monster: it existed as an antagonistic external force that held a lot of control in ancient society, determining the order of that society through its actions as a water god. Appeasing the dragon's will was a crucial part of survival, because without water and rain, the people could not achieve harmony and order within their society, or continue to live in that area at all.

Just like many other monster cultures, the early Chinese dealt with their dragon through sacrifice and proper reverence. These measures were the early Chinese people's ways of attempting to prevent the dragon from disrupting the order of their society. Yet, they also depended on the dragon at all times for their lives to be sustainable. Therefore, the dragon for these early Chinese civilizations represented a crucial, benevolent, life-giving deity, as well as a tempestuous, destructive, and life-taking deity. Essentially, the early Chinese dragon represents both a benign and a malignant god, which makes it a source of life and power as well as danger.

Arguably, the creation of the first Chinese dragon images could be interpreted as these early people's attempts to categorize and understand this greater power. The earliest forms of dragons in Chinese art include variations of the following features: the body of a snake, the head of either a human or an animal, and occasionally the inclusion of another animal's physical traits.[16] Dragon-shaped pendants were found in early tombs "on the

[16] Yang Xin's introduction to the *Art of the Dragon* discusses the variation of Neolithic dragon models. This variation is due to different subcultures having their own models: such as the Hongshan culture (head

breasts of skeletons" and were "probably talismans worn to protect [their owners] from evil or to provide good fortune" (Bates 3). The use of farm animal traits in the visual portrayal of dragons most likely arose from the close connection these early people maintained with their livestock: their animals were familiar to them, and they were of nature, so the people probably assumed that divine beings only naturally resembled these animals in certain ways. The connection of the dragon with the snake also conjures different types of symbolism[17], as Jones' noted in his focus on the predator triad encapsulating the raptor, leopard, and snake.[18]

This early carving of the dragon (Figure 2) shows a pig-faced dragon with a "C-curve" serpentine body and can be seen as "being made up of a physical substance and an abstract symbol" (Zhao 3). In other words, the creator combined elements of known animals so as to portray the obscure concept of the dragon. This jade dragon design represents one of the many different styles that early Chinese artists used to represent dragons. This alternative version of the dragon shows another pig-faced dragon with a horse's mane, or a crest, as well as a serpentine tail (Figure 3)[19]. However, this version is lighter and allows more negative space to exist within the "C-curve", emphasizing a wide variation in carving style at this point in time in early Chinese history. As these various pendants illustrate, very early in Chinese art history the dragon assumed many forms as depicted by the subcultures of the country.

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of a pig, body of a snake, mane of a horse), as compared to the Yangshao culture (human or animal head, body of a snake or fish) (10).

[17] For more information about snake symbolism, refer to Morgan's text titled *Snakes in Myth, Magic, and History*.

[18] Bates also mentions that the Chinese dragon could have evolved from images of crocodiles, as opposed to snakes (2).

[19] Other versions of dragons fashioned out of jade can be seen in Figures 4 and 5.

In creating their images of the dragon, these early Chinese people unconsciously began to assign them boundaries. Martin Powers, in his analysis *Pattern and Person: Ornament, Society, and Self*, identified and referred to this behavior as the bringing together of the related concepts of "seeing" and "knowing". Powers references a quote by Rudolf Arnheim noting: 'direct observation…is an exploration by the form-seeking mind, which needs to understand but cannot unless it casts what it sees into manageable models'" (Powers 10). By creating an image for their dragons the early Chinese created manageable models of their abstract deity. In so doing, they could begin to relate to their deity on a realistic, every-day level. By giving form to the dragon, they began to understand the desires of that being and learned to gain its favor through appropriate sacrifice and veneration. However, in placing boundaries around the form of the dragon, they also began to limit its power, literally trapping it in a subdued state of being.[20]

The idea that the depiction of the dragon also represents a subconscious attempt to place it in categories refers back to monster theory. As explained previously, monsters' forms commonly derive from creative combinations of animalistic features. As with monsters generally, the Chinese tendency to categorize their dragons into such visual models represents their human desire for order and control over the greater powers of nature.[21]

[20] Powers expands on this idea, noting: "The process of organizing our basic mental relation to any phenomenon through a series of concepts is similar to that involved in the marking of the earth with frontiers and boundaries…The bond may run deep. Some research in cognitive psychology suggests that simple graphic configurations such as inclusion may lie at the very root of basic semantic relationships such as possession" (10). The idea of capturing an abstract concept through design, possessing it through form, applies directly to the Chinese dragon imagery and symbolism.

[21] Bates, as well as Hargreaves, lists the many forms and categories of the Chinese dragon throughout his text. These include, but are not limited to: *kui* bronze vessel dragons, hornless *li* dragons, *fei yu* fish-dragons, and *shen long* spirit dragons.

Although early Chinese dragon imagery usually included only two or three animal/human combinations, later records show that dragons grew to incorporate a systematic inclusion of certain animal features. As Bates explains:

> Wang Fu (73 – 48 BC), a self-styled expert on dragons, wrote that, 'According to popular custom the dragon's shape was drawn with a horse's head and a snake's tail.' But he disagreed with this 'popular custom', and firmly stated that the head of a dragon was like that of a camel, with eyes like those of a devil, ears like those of an ox, and horns like those of a deer. He avowed that the neck was like that of a snake, the abdomen was like that of a large cockle, and the body had scales like those of a carp. The feet, he added, had claws like those of an eagle, though the soles were soft like those of a tiger…It can be seen, therefore, that the dragon was made up of discrete parts of tangible animals. (Bates, 5)

While this record clearly illustrates a conceptual divide in dragon images, it also gives examples of the types of animals people believed the dragon resembled. Just like Jones' raptor/leopard/snake triad, Wang Fu's description of the dragon's features includes those of an eagle, tiger, and snake, among other things.

The inclusion of these predators' traits draws the Chinese dragon back into the contextual framework of monster theory. Jones' theory about the universal predator triad holds especially true for the Chinese dragon. The use of the eagle, tiger, and snake traits in the conceptual design of the Chinese dragon alludes to the possibly ferocious and dangerous side of the dragon's nature. As with monsters elsewhere, the Chinese provided their dragon with all the natural weapons predators could use to harm humans.[22] As

[22] While many scholars of the Chinese dragon discuss the power of the dragon and its significance for the people, they do not analyze the characteristics of the dragon that symbolize physical threats or danger for

potential physical predators, dragons represent threats to human society, even when their most virulent weapon remained their control over water.

Thus, the early Chinese dragon represents a power beyond the human, meaning the dragon is not limited by the rules and regulations of human society. As a potential threat to their subjects, the Chinese dragon even held authority over rulers, the highest position of governmental status.[23] While the early Chinese dragon often existed as a benign creature, it also represented a nuisance to the people through providing or withholding water according to its whims that could only be placated through sacrifice.[24]

All in all, the early Chinese dragon is associated with both positive and negative connotations. As a being symbol of the water cycle, it regulates the normal, amicable weather conditions required for every-day life, but it is also responsible for severe water conditions such as floods and droughts. Because water is such a crucial factor for life to exist in any place, the dragon held a lot of power in early Chinese societies. Through their depictions of the dragon, the Chinese people attempted to understand their deity, so as to better appease its will. Overall, the dragon represented a presence that was fear or wariness inspiring in early Chinese people, which makes it much more similar to our traditional conception of monsters than has been previously acknowledged.

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those people. However, as I argue, the Chinese dragon as a monster *does* represent a metaphysical threat to the Chinese on a basic level.

[23] Zhao discusses this, in relation to Chinese "hydraulic" society (103). Eno also elaborates on the River Power's authority over the ruler: the "River Power [possessed the] ability to harm the person of the king" and bring destruction to his subjects should he not properly respect the River Power (63).

[24] Bates elaborates on the different types of sacrifices given to the dragon (18-24). As do Pearce, Spiro, and Ebrey in *Culture and Power* (6).

## Part 3: The Dragon as Change

In China, certain philosophies regard the dragon as a spirit of virtuosity to be emulated, more than a monstrous deity to be feared. Most notably, practitioners of Taoism upheld the dragon as a sacred symbol associated with the positive forces in the universe, as well as a creature that embodies the nature of the Tao itself. Despite the associations of the Chinese dragon with the potentially dangerous and destructive forces of water, with which the dragon could annihilate the order of society, the Taoist interpretation of the dragon is that of a creature whose existence should be celebrated. However, even in this Chinese tradition that venerates the dragon as a benign being, the human need to gain and control power over the dragon dominates in the end.

Taoism, a system of beliefs indigenous to China, originated very early on in the country's history, and is based on concepts as complex as modern nuclear physics. Founded by Laozi[1], Taoism focuses on the natural world and the intuitive harmony of living within the Tao (The Way). In his introduction titled "Taoism and the Arts of China", Stephen Little explains: "Taoism teaches that to be content as a human being, one must accept that change (transformation) is the absolute reality, and that all things and transformations are unified in the Tao" (Little 14).

[1] From Little's *Taoism and the Arts of China*, Kristofer Schipper's chapter titled "Taoism: the Story of the Way" gives a brief summary of Laozi, the Taoist founder. Schipper notes: "Laozi is said to have been seen in the world at a time corresponding to the sixth century B.C…A later legend of his birth tells us that Laozi's mother was a virgin who conceived him spontaneously, through the radiance of the Pole Star in the center of the sky. She carried her child for eighty-one years…before he was born through her left armpit…a phenomenon of transubstantiation, because mother and son were one and the same person" (Little 33). It is said that Laozi and Confucius met in the court of the Zhou Dynasty, and that "Laozi did not agree with Confucius's ideas, and told his noble visitor that naturalness, personal freedom, and happiness were more important than trying to conform to traditional standards" (Little 33). Laozi was always portrayed as a commoner who achieved fame through his paradoxical insights, which became the founding principles of Taoism.

Unlike many other religions, Taoism has no supreme being, only the Tao itself, "underlying and permeating reality" (Little 13). Little notes that the Tao is "conceived as the void out of which all reality emerges, so vast that it cannot be described in words…[It is] beyond time and space" (Little 13). All life begins and ends within the Tao[2]; all form eventually gives way to formlessness. Instead of fearing the possible chaos associated with formlessness, Taoist masters actively seek this state.

The ultimate goal of Taoist practitioners is to become one with this cosmic energy of the Tao, effectively transcending all concepts of form and embracing formlessness. In achieving formlessness, they eliminate the need for boundaries, structures, or rules; shedding the shackles of human and social needs. The masters become one with an energy that constantly transitions back and forth between order and disorder, life and death. They cease to exist as individuals and give themselves willingly to the greater existence of the Tao. In so doing, they achieve the power of the Tao through succumbing to it, and become immortal as energy within the Tao.

Multiple scholars have made the connection between the dragon and the Chinese concept of the Tao.[3] For example, in his analysis of the Chinese dragon, Qiguang Zhao states: "In Chinese, *Tao* is described as the 'valley spirit' and is depicted as a dragon, i.e., as a winding watercourse" (Zhao 76). The dragon, as a part of the Tao, also had the ability to either become one with greater energy of the Tao or exist as an individual entity within the Tao. In other words, the dragon possesses the ability to take form or remain

[2] The Tao is defined by complementing dualities, represented by negative and positive energies called yin and yang. Yin and yang provide form within the Tao, constituting essential parts of the greater whole. Yin represents: dark, female, low, cold, water, and earth. Yang represents: light, male, high, hot, fire, and air. Yin and yang push and pull each other; one cannot exist without the other. As yin is waxing, yang is waning; as yin wanes, yang waxes. Yin and yang are often visually represented with the *taijitu*. The dragon is believed to be an embodiment of yang energy.

[3] Powers also discusses the dragon's connection to the concept of the Tao (168).

formless, so as to move throughout all aspects of the Tao, including transitioning between life and death.

For the Taoists, the dragon's power comes from its ability to move freely through the energy of the Tao. Bates explains the dragon's ability to switch between form and formlessness: "it was said that the dragon could change its size at will: it could become the size of a silkworm or could swell to fill the space between heaven and earth…It also seems that they could make themselves visible or invisible at their pleasure" (Bates 16). The Chinese dragon could manipulate the energy of the Tao, changing its state of being so that it is able to live in perfect harmony with the Tao and nature.

The concept of the dragon as free from the boundaries of form is reminiscent of Mary Douglas' references to order and disorder. The Chinese dragon literally occupies the "indeterminable" space, as Douglas refers to the state between order and disorder, between existences in the Tao. It rejects all concepts of boundaries, permanently occupying the transitional states of being. Because of this ability, the Chinese dragon could be associated with chaos and entropy, and thus feared by the Chinese as a threatening presence hovering over society. Yet, this is not the case; and this is because Taoist practitioners celebrate disorder, rather than fear it. It can be inferred, therefore, that one of the major reasons why the dragon was not considered to be a malignant force throughout Chinese history was because of the development of Taoism and the religion's deification of disorder as the perfect state of being. In China, the dragon did not serve as the vilified, dangerous, disorderly "other" who existed solely to keep society's order intact. Instead, it symbolized disorder as a necessary and complementing factor to order.

For the Taoists, danger does not lie in disorder and formlessness; instead, they believe that disorder is the essence of life. Life begins and ends in disorder in the space they call the Tao. In other words, the Tao symbolizes disorder, disunity, and formlessness. Because the Taoists consider the Tao to be the sacred space of existence, they seek to emulate it through meditation and divination. As Douglas mentions, disorder implies unlimited potential for future patterning and creating, and therefore it represents infinite power and possibility. As a being associated with the power of the Tao, the Chinese dragon thus also represented unlimited power, derived from its ability to change forms.

The dragon is associated with the concept of change,[4] which is a fundamental factor in Taoist philosophy, since the Taoist believe that change is the essence of life itself. Change commands the space between order and disorder: it is the energy that connects the two forms of existence. The dragon, as the embodiment of change, represents a power greater than any one man could possess: the power of life and creation, as well as death and destruction.

As the Taoists believe, change is necessary so that life can prevail. Without change, there is no development, evolution, or need for growth. One of the earliest Chinese historical records, the *Book of Changes* (*I Ching)* defines "change" through word associations: "gradual, continuous…melt, dissolve; be born, die; influence…[or] sudden mutation" (Ritsema and Augusto 707). The dragon encompasses all of these descriptive words defining change. The melting and dissolving part of change ties in with the

[4] Zhao also makes the connection between the dragon and change, tying in the concept of the dragon as creativity as well (78 – 81). Zhao explains that the dragon is a primal power of continuity, originality, and strength. The dragon's association with creativity comes from change and transformation, in that it is able to intellectually or physically overcome all obstacles with these two traits.

dragon's connection to the water cycle, which is defined by its transitional process of moving between liquid, solid, and gas. A quote from Okakura Kakuso's *Book of Tea* illustrates the dragon's connection to change as well as the water cycle:

> The dragon is the spirit of change, therefore of life itself, taking new forms according to its surroundings, yet never seen in its final shape…He unfolds himself in the storm cloud. He washes his mane in the darkness of the seething whirlpools. His claws are the fork of lightning…His voice is heard in the hurricane…The dragon reveals himself only to vanish." (Bates frontispiece)

As water moves between these varying states of being, so too does the dragon alter its form and appearance in nature.

The dragon's transitory nature as the embodiment of change is beautifully captured in this handscroll painted by Chen Rong (Figure 6)[5]. As seen in this ink handscroll painting, the dragon materializes from and dematerializes into the clouds surrounding it. The contrast between the dark, thin detailed brush strokes defining the dragon's form and the soft, large brush strokes of the clouds creates a visual tension, emphasizing the dragon's transitory nature. In a way, the dragon is almost stuck between two existences, being neither highly dense nor exceedingly dissipated. This depiction of the dragon as both having form and being formless encapsulates the dragon's ability to switch between forms within the Tao at will.[6]

[5] Chen Rong, *Nine Dragons* (detail). Southern Song Dynasty, dated 1244. Handscroll; ink and light color on paper.

[6] There is also the idea, presented by Fong, that the painted dragon had "magical powers that could invoke a real dragon" (366). Fong elaborates on a particular legend, "the legend of the magic painter who, in a final flourish, laid in the dragon's eyes, thus enabling it to come to life and fly away" (366). Even within the painting medium, dragons are able to move between forms.

Because of this dual representation of form and formlessness, Chen Rong's dragon is never seen in its entirety. There is the possibility that the artist deliberately concealed parts of the dragon, so as to emphasize that the dragon's position as an abstract and vast being cannot truly be captured through the means of two-dimensional, visual representation.[7] By choosing to leave some portions of the dragon hidden within the mist, the artist leaves the dragon enigmatic.

As exemplified in the painting above, dragons are often depicted in Chinese artworks with clouds either encompassing or complementing them.[8] Zhao argues that dragons are painted with clouds because both the aesthetic "shape and the movement of the Chinese dragon are similar to rolling clouds" (Zhao 73). Zhao continues to say: "Dragons are accompanied by clouds in most Chinese paintings, relief sculptures, and pillars of houses", mainly because of the connection between clouds and their adaptability in changing their form, as well as their potential for dangerous power, such as harboring thunder and lightning storms (Zhao 73). There is also the connection between dragons and the water cycle, of which clouds are a vital part.

Many artworks depict the Chinese dragon disappearing into the clouds. Another example, aside from Chen Rong's painting, includes this painting by Ming Dynasty

[7] Fong expands on Chen Rong's rumored painting style and technique: "Serving as a magistrate at Dragon-Tiger Mountain, [Chen] painted dragons in the tradition of the eccentric untrammeled painters. A description of [Chen] by the fourteenth-century author Hsia Wen-yen says he 'makes clouds by splashing ink, creates vapor by spraying water, and, while drunk and shouting loudly, takes off his cap, soaks it in ink, and smears and rubs with it before finishing the painting with a brush'" (367). There are many historical references to inebriated or "drunken" Chinese masters, who used their "elevated" state to expand their minds and loosen their bodies (martial arts). For more information, Lee discusses Northern and Southern Song painting styles' art production and politics in depth (358 – 382).

[8] Powers also discusses the correlation between dragon and cloud imagery (182 – 184). He infers, based on the dragon design of a particular Warring States ($4^{th}$ – $3^{rd}$ centuries B.C.E) lacquer ware, that the dragons are most likely caught in the act of transforming from one state to the next. Therefore, the clouds represent the intermediary form of the dragon conceived by the artist.

(1368–1644) painter Wang Zhao, titled *Picture of a Soaring Dragon*[9] (Figure 7). This ink painting shows the dragon (upper-right corner) disappearing into the swirling, darkening clouds, while one of two humans peers wistfully up at it from the ground below. The juxtaposition of the corporeal, earth-bound forms of the humans with the semi-incorporeal, air-born form of the dragon serves to raise the dragon into the higher status of the divine. It is greater than the human form and as such has the ability to change into cloud, rain, sky, or soaring beast. The painter captures an isolated moment in time, when the human catches a glimpse of this majestic beast, before it disappears into the clouds as quickly as it appeared. This painting emphasizes the distance between the dragon and man, as an immortal compared to a mortal.

As the symbol of change, the Taoists respect the dragon for its immortal connection to the Tao. Many Taoist masters honored and respected the dragon due to its power, seeking to emulate the dragon's natural state of being so as to get closer to the energy of the Tao. However, these humans who are chasing after wisdom and power through the means of the Tao ultimately end up attempting to control the dragon instead. As Zhao notes: "the dragon as a symbol of the sky tends to disappear [from religious practices]…replaced by other symbolic aspects of the dragon: worship of the sovereign, ancestor cult, and the wish for fertility" (Zhao 74). The dragon becomes a symbol of those aspects of life that are unattainable, such as becoming immortal through achieving harmony with the Tao.

Because the dragon possesses the ability to naturally access the power of the Tao, it also signifies the human inability to shed their corporeal form and become one with the Tao. Therefore, the Chinese dragon becomes a symbol of inaccessible power, which

[9] Wang Zhao, *Picture of a Soaring Dragon*, Ming Dynasty, Silk painting in ink and color.

ultimately makes it irresistible for humans to want to "tame" it in one way or another. One form of visual and literary taming of the Chinese dragon occurs through the reduction of the majestic Chinese dragon to a means of transportation.[10] Taoist masters who gained access to immortality used dragons as steeds to transport them between the mortal and the immortal worlds. Eventually, dragons came to be the vehicles for all celestial, humanoid gods of the Taoist pantheon.

John Bates ironically asks: "Since the dragon was able to fly, would not the heavenly spirits use this beasts to ride on? Of course." (Bates 27) Despite not having a central deity to begin with, Taoism eventually did evolve many gods over the centuries. These gods served the purpose of putting a "recognizable [human] face on the Tao itself" (Little 13). Belonging to the Cult of Immortals, a strand in the Taoist tradition, these immortals could control their own transformations within the Tao, like the dragon.

Taoist artworks of the immortal gods often depict them riding dragons, or harnessing the dragons like horses to their flying chariots. Stephen Little notes: "Dragons …from the Warring States period onward (471 -221 B.C.) were depicted as the vehicles of gods and transcendents" (Little 160). Little further explains this development of the dragon as transport: "When human beings attained realization or perfection…they were often described as ascending to heaven in broad daylight on the back of a dragon" (Little

[10] The use of the Chinese dragon as a steed remains unanalyzed by art historians and Chinese dragonologists; yet, the "riding" of the dragon implies that the dragon is a wild animal that has been "broken-in" by the humanoid form, or that the dragon is a willingly submissive creature that bows to the greater power of the humanoid immortal form. In either case, the dragon becomes a domesticated animal for immortals to use as transportation devices, rather than the embodiment of nature's power and the representation of uncontrollable change.

160). An artwork that exemplifies the immortal human riding a dragon is Ma Yuan's *Immortal Riding a Dragon*[11] (Figure 8).

In this hanging scroll, Ma Yuan[12] depicts a Taoist adept who is soaring through the air on a dragon. On the bottom right, a demon carries this master's dragon-headed staff. Not only is this Taoist master riding the dragon, signifying a conquering of the power of the Tao through the subjugation of one of its most lofty creatures, he also has a demon under his command and acting submissive enough to be his staff-bearer. The master's expression is intense as he gazes knowingly into the distance.

This painting serves more to emphasize the human domination over the natural world than to rejoice in the master's ascension into the harmony with the Tao. Although the dragon has not been slain, this painting emphasizes that is has been broken in by the master, almost meekly transporting him between destinations. Like the demon enthralled with the master's power and wisdom, so too is the dragon forced to obey the will of this humanoid immortal. In this painting, the dragon does not represent the divine, all-encompassing aspects of nature, but instead it serves to emphasize the control humans have gained over that nature.[13]

Therefore, for humans, reaching the same level of perfection as the dragon also implies gaining dominance over the dragon and its many manifestations. Despite their

[11] Ma Yuan (active c. 1190 – c. 1230) *Immortal Riding a Dragon*, Southern Song Dynasty, early 13th century, Hanging Scroll.

[12] As Lee elaborates, Ma Yuan was part of the school of the Southern Song Dynasty, and is known as one of the artists who helped establish the "lyric mode" of painting. He was painting at a time when "the dynasty was politically weak and factionalism at court impeded coherent and effectual government" (377). He is known for his asymmetrical "romantic" compositions that create an off-balance or tension in the piece, and the juxtaposition of "space against form, mystery against sharp explicitness" (377). I will propose that this stylistic tension between space and form can be seen in the painting pictured here. I will also claim that Ma Yuan's use of mystery versus explicitness can be directly linked to his portrayal of the dragon, which is half-materialized from the clouds.

[13] Two more examples of immortals riding dragons can be seen in Figures 9 and 10.

deification of the dragon as an embodiment of the Tao, Taoist painters depict the dragon as being subordinate to the human figures once those humans have transcended into immortality. Thus, the Taoists fall into the monster tradition of establishing rules and regulations, delegating the dragon to a lower ranking beast of burden so as to be able to control its powers of transformation within the Tao. Even though the dragon is not considered by Taoist practitioners to be a threatening "other" to be destroyed, it is still powerful enough as a symbol of disorder and change to represent a presence to be conquered. In achieving harmony with the Tao and gaining immortality, the last step is to control the elusive and all-powerful dragon.

In a sense, gaining power over the Chinese dragon in the Taoist tradition represents the defeating of death itself, since being able to ride a dragon implies they have already achieved immortality. The conquering of the Chinese dragon therefore implies a human desire to gain power over mortality, signifying a fear of death. As a construct of the human mind, the Chinese dragon has the ability to change forms at will, becoming one with nature or the energy of the Tao. It can go where no human body is able to go. In this interpretation, the Chinese dragon represents human hopes and dreams, and their desires to transcend the boundaries of their human forms[14] without having to succumb to death.

Ultimately, the deification of the dragon as a being of formlessness, change, and transcendence, circles back to the human desire for power, most notably a desire to

[14] The Chinese dragon came to be associated with the human soul as well. If the Chinese people could not gain immortality within their lifetimes, they hoped that their soul would transcend after death. Laurence Binyon notes, in *The Flight of the Dragon*, that "the soul identified itself with the wind which bloweth where it listeth, with the cloud and the mist that melt away in rain, and [is] drawn up again into the air; and this sovereign energy of the soul, fluid, penetrating, ever-changing, took form in the symbolic Dragon" (Binyon 27). The soul, like the dragon, is formless and has the ability to transcend to heaven, unlike the human body.

circumnavigate death. While conceptually the dragon embodies the spirit and form of the Tao, in most instances in which it appears in Chinese artistic works it is reduced to a fraction of its potentiality. Again, the human attempts to understand the dragon become ways of categorizing, and eventually controlling the dragon. Except for the instances of Chen Rong and Wang Zhao's dragon depictions, the lines of these ink paintings capture the dragon in a diminished form, not fully able to portray its overall power and significance. In the end, the dragon as a symbol in these Taoist artworks exemplifies the human fascination with championing death and gaining access to the overall power of the universe. Even though the dragon started off as a symbol of celebrated, unattainable power, eventually it became a tool with which humans attempt to gather power over their own mortality.

## Part 4: The Dragon as Ambition

While in the Chinese religious context the dragon symbolized change and the human desire for power over mortality, on a secular level, the dragon came to be associated with the acquiring of social status. Throughout Chinese history, peasants and emperors alike used the dragon's symbolism to gain power within society. The Chinese people's manipulation of the symbol of the dragon so as to gain access power ultimately exposes greater human vulnerabilities, effectively revealing the monster within.

The Chinese dragon and the ruler of the Chinese people have always had a complex relationship, but the dragon only came to be associated with the emperor around 200 B.C.E., with the founding of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.). This was because of the ambitions of one man, Liu Bang, who used the symbolism of the dragon to seize power and ascend to the throne.

At the end of the Qin Dynasty (221 – 206 B.C.E.), a period defined by its tyrannical, militaristic dictatorship, a power struggle ensued over who would be the next ruler. Liu Bang, a charismatic rebel leader of humble origins rose in prominence during this time, eventually gaining enough support to emerge the victor of the power struggle. Known posthumously as Emperor Gaozu of Han, Liu Bang became the founder the Han Dynasty.[15] After ascending to the throne, he and his followers brought about "a more unified cultural and political framework" that helped the Chinese population recuperate from the Qin Dynasty's turbulence (Lee 60)[16].

[15] The Han Dynasty brought about new rulers, vastly different governmental strategies from the previous tyrannical government of the Qin Dynasty, and a whole variety of new art styles and patrons. Notably, Liu Bang and his scholars "reconstituted Confucianism, adapting it to contemporary concerns", as well as Taoism (Lee 60). After ascending to the throne, Liu Bang legalized practices that the previous Qin emperor had persecuted people for performing.

[16] Both Confucianism and Taoism were very popular philosophies during the Han Dynasty, each playing a dominant role in the society. Confucianism, founded by Confucius in 551 BCE, focused on the non-

Because of his lowly social status, Liu Bang had to fight to legitimize his claim to the throne. As noted by Yang Xin, Li Yihua, and Xu Naixiang, in *The Art of the Dragon*, Liu Bang, "[born] to a humble family amid the confusion of the wars at the end of the Qin dynasty…could not compare himself to the descendants of the kings and princes" of the previous dynasties (Xin et al. 15). So as to achieve respect and power, Liu Bang invented a tale about his conception, asserting that he was the son of a dragon. Liu Bang's tale is recorded as such:

> The 'Biography of Emperor Gaozu' in the *Records of the Historian*, states: 'Liu's mother was sleeping one day on the slope of a marsh and met a god in her dream. The sky was overcast, and there was thunder and lightning. When her husband came looking for her, he saw a dragon mounting her. She subsequently became pregnant and gave birth to Emperor Gaozu. (Xin et al. 15)

Other accounts of this story suggest that Liu Bang's mother was impregnated merely from glimpsing the dragon in the sky. In all accounts, however, Liu Bang's father is the almighty Chinese dragon, thus he is the one that nature has chosen to rule over the Chinese land. Emperor Gaozu was even said to have physically resembled a dragon. The authors of *Art of the Dragon* elaborate on these traits: "When he grew up to be a man,

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metaphysical and humanistic aspects of Chinese society. It centered on political and familial relationships, emphasizing the need for order, hierarchy, filial piety, moderation, and virtue. Steuber notes: "Confucius (*Kongzi)* (551-497 BCE)…lived in China during a period of political turmoil. Touching upon all aspects of human life, from birth to death, Confucius meant for his doctrines to be accessible to all segments of society…His discussions of the proper behavior in various relationships – such as parent/child, young/old, female/male, subject/government minister – relied upon not only his own insight but also on classical literature" (Steuber 9). On the other hand, the metaphysical aspects of human existence defined Taoism. Both of these ideologies were highly supported by Han society. Neither one cancelled the other out, because each played a vital role in separate parts of societal existence. As noted by Lee: "Much of this fabric of myth, miracle, and magic was absorbed by [Taoism]. Equally with Confucianism, this fantastical popular lore supplied subjects and themes for much Han art – ethical examples and exemplars from Confucianism; a salmagundi of spirits, deities, oracles, and shamans in all shapes and forms from [Taoism]" (Lee 60).

[Emperor Gaozu] had the regular features of a dragon and a beautiful beard"[17] (Xin et al. 15). Liu Bang used this grand status of the dragon, as it was established by the earlier Chinese cultures, to heighten his own appeal as a leader.

In so doing, Liu Bang/Emperor Gaozu irrevocably tied the dragon to the emperor. The Chinese people believed that, through having the bloodline of the descendants from the dragon on the throne, the spirits, the land, and the people would remain harmonious. This belief ties back to the early Chinese people's reverence for the power of the dragon and its control over water, as well as their fear of its wrathful retribution. An emperor with a direct blood connection to the dragon represented someone who the dragon would look favorably upon, thus keeping the order of the land balanced and the people under the rule of this emperor safe.

From Emperor Gaozu onwards, the dragon and the emperor were closely tied, so much so that the emperor was referred to as the dragon[18]. The accumulated honor of the dragon helped to raise the status of the first emperors, and the prestige of the emperor in turn helped to perpetuate the image of the dragon in Chinese culture. Eventually, the Chinese dragon came to represent not only the emperor, but also the greater entity of China itself.

Liu Bang's success in using the iconography of the dragon to making a claim for the throne came mostly from the Han Chinese people's awe of myth, miracle, and magic. The people of the Han Dynasty were very interested in the older superstitions and cult

[17] Chinese dragons' beards are notoriously well documented and elaborated upon by historians, who traditionally saw the beard as a symbol of nobility and strength.

[18] As Bates notes: "The word dragon was now used in the name of everything to do with the emperor's life and position. The emperor himself became known as the 'True Dragon' and his person was styled the 'Dragon's Body' or the 'Dragon's Person'. The throne of all emperors was referred to as the 'Dragon's Seat'. Imperial children became the 'Dragon's Seed'. The future emperor was the 'Hidden Dragon'. The imperial way became known as the 'Dragon's Path' or 'Dragon's Way'…" (25-26).

practices of earlier Chinese people. As Sherman E. Lee notes: "A vast array of superstitions and cult practices, and an enduring preoccupation with immortality or longevity and the means to achieve them, engaged the Han populace, up to and including the emperors" (Lee 60). The dragon ranked highly on the list of Han people's fascination with their ancestors' religious practices. In a brilliant and ambitious socio-governmental maneuver, Liu Bang utilized the dragon to elevate his status so that he could become emperor.

Liu Bang's use of the dragon to gain access to power exemplifies the same type of power manipulation strategy that the Taoist masters employed so as to harness the greater power of the Tao. Liu Bang and these masters figuratively rode the dragon's back, ascending to a higher level of power. While the Taoists capitalized on the dragon's transitory nature to gain immortality and control within the Tao, Liu Bang manipulated the auspicious symbolism of the dragon so as to gain favor with the Chinese populace, thus gaining actual power in society rather than just metaphysical power after death. In this context, the dragon became an actual means to achieve higher status in society.

For the common people of China, the dragon also alluded to the possibility of pushing through certain social boundaries. Particularly, the dragon came to be associated with members of society who were able to pass the rigorous exam system[19], initiated in the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907) and fully established in the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279)[20].

[19] Lee explains the Song Dynasty's civil service exam system: "Office was no longer the prerogative of powerful clans; rather, influence and prestige were the perquisites of office. The civil service examinations, tentatively begun four centuries before, were regularized and expanded, and promotions were based on examination standing, tenure, and merit" (358). Lee continues to elaborate on this system and its sociopolitical intricacies (359).

[20] The Song Dynasty thrived on trade with other parts of Asia, interacting with places as far away as the Middle East. The trade routes were originally expanded during the Tang Dynasty, which is when the city capital populations started to become increasingly more diverse and cosmopolitan. The Tang cities were tolerant of foreign religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. With the collapse of the

These civil service exams, in theory, provided opportunities for citizens to be placed in societal positions based on their merit. This allowed the possibility for common people to gain access to power, which was previously not permitted within the Chinese's strict Confucian society. The establishment of the civil exam systems gave rise to a new type of social class: the "literati", or "scholar-gentry" class. Men became members of the literati[21] after they successfully passed the imperial examination system, effectively ascending through the ranks to achieve higher socio-governmental statuses than would have been previously possible.

A man who successfully passed the rigor of the exams came to be known as the carp that had leaped over the Dragon's Gate. Traditionally, a Dragon's Gate is situated on the top of a steep waterfall, suggesting a precarious and taxing journey on the part of the carp. Bates expands on the significance behind this title:

> A legend grew…that carp that leaped over the rapids of the Yellow River at the Dragon's Gate (Longmen)…had their heads burned off by lightning…[Subsequently, their fish heads were] replaced by a dragon's face…The long struggle of these fish against the rapids, and their eventual success in leaping over them, became synonymous with the long struggle of the literary scholar who eventually achieved success after much persistence and exertion. (Bates 11)

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Tang Dynasty, Song rulers sought to distance themselves from the previous dynasty's corruption. They looked instead back to the beginning of the Han Dynasty and the success of Confucianism; neo-Confucianism became increasingly more popular in Song society.

[21] The literati had a gigantic impact on the art culture of China; many founded schools of painting that influenced entire styles and productions of artworks. For more information on the literati painters, see Lee's Chapter 14 "Chinese Art of the Song Dynasty and Korean Ceramics of Koryo" (358 – 396).

To risk ascension to the top of the waterfall involves great struggle and danger for the carp. Yet, the risk is worth the reward. In the carp's case, the fish becomes a partial dragon (carp-dragon), signifying the gaining of wisdom, power, and longevity. This is also true for the scholar, who emerges victorious from his long and tedious struggle, having just achieved a powerful position in the government and respect from their peers and greater Chinese society. Both of these transformational processes require a lot of time and self-sacrifice, and victory is limited to the select few who are worthy to receive the title of dragon.

As previously discussed in relation to the Taoist tradition, the dragon represents the ideal state of being within the Tao. Once again, but in a secular context, the dragon symbolizes a desirable end goal to be reached by Chinese scholars. Becoming a dragon means reaching one's highest goals. According to this tale of the carp transforming into a dragon, those who work hard enough can eventually reach their goal and realize their power, even managing to become metaphorically as magnificent as the dragon. In other words, through perseverance and sheer force of will, humans can transcend all boundaries, and eradicate the gap between them and the unattainable. Just as Liu Bang fought the odds to become the emperor, so too did these scholars successfully dedicate their lives to learning, so that they could achieve high positions in society.

While the accomplishment of these goals is admirable and inspiring, there is also the lingering suggestion that no matter how many goals we set, humans will never be able to satiate their ambitious natures.[22] That is, our own ambitious natures keep our ultimate goals just out of our reach. Once one goal and achievement of power and prestige is realized, another, more ambitious position of power makes itself known, and the process

[22] Powers also discusses the connection between the dragon and the "ambitious man" (166 – 170).

begins again. Therefore, the pursuit of ultimate power keeps people constantly moving forward so as to conquer the next obstacle. In this interpretation, there is always a state of being that is more powerful than one's current state, and there is always another level of accomplishment that we strive for in order to better ourselves. Perfection, in this estimation, is not possible.

As a representation of the perfect state of being, the dragon in this context represents an unattainable goal. If success is fleeting and perfection is always one step ahead, then the dragon, as a metaphor for both of these concepts, is incredibly elusive for humans. Because of this elusiveness, the dragon teases the part of our nature that seeks that ultimate power and control. The human desire for power and our ambitious natures reflect a monstrous part of our selves. Our own ambitions consume us from within; our desire for power is a cannibalistic monster that resides within our subconscious. It is never satiated, constantly forcing us to achieve the next level of perfection. However, the dragon represents a perfect level of power that humans will always attempt to achieve but will never be able to reach. The ultimate power of the dragon is, alas, unattainable. Because it is unattainable, the dragon represents a frustration for human desires and ambitions.

The human frustration with their inability to control life and death, and their constant pursuit of this unattainable goal for ultimate power, can be seen in this silk painting from the Song Dynasty. This silk painting, created by an anonymous painter, is titled the *Goddess of Luo* (Figure 11)[23]. This painting depicts a scene from the famous

[23] Anonymous painter, *Goddess of Luo* (detail), Song Dynasty, Silk painting in color.

poem by Cao Zhi (192 – 232),[24] called the "Ode of the Goddess of the Luo River",[25] in which the poet recounts his "liaison with a beautiful river spirit" (McCausland 27). In summary, the poem describes Cao Zhi's long journey "from the capital to his country estate, [on which he] spies a beauty that is invisible to other men. Discovering who she is, Cao Zhi begins to court her" (McCausland 27). This beauty, an immortal who dwells by the river and rides in a carriage pulled by six dragons, ultimately falls in love with Cao Zhi. However, "in the course of their encounters by the Luo River it transpires that the gap between the world of men and spirits cannot be bridged, and the affair ends, leaving the poet disconsolate" (McCausland 27). The story of the Goddess and her mortal lover serves to illustrate the human desire for immortality. If the mortal could have become immortal, he could have stayed with his lover. Yet, these two beings, defined by their mortality or immortality, ultimately cannot dispense with the boundaries that are keeping them apart. While humanity takes pleasure in courting this unattainable power, in the end it remains out of our reach.[26]

Visually, this painting represents another image of humanoid forms that have yoked the dragon into obedience. These six, highly stylized and uniform dragons use the clouds to propel them across the river's surface (Figure 11a). These dragons represent nothing more than ornamentation for the frame of the Goddess sitting in the chariot. Their sinuous, yet stiff forms imply none of the vitality and movement usually attributed to the dragon's form; instead they look as though they are being forced into a formal trot.

[24] Robert Cutter thoroughly analyzes Cao Zhi's life and poetic works, in his dissertation titled "Cao Zhi (192 – 232) and His Poetry".
[25] This poem by Cao Zhi is the subject of many Chinese paintings, the most famous of which are attributed to the painter Gu Kaizhi (c. 344 – c. 406). Lee provides the translated poem and describes Gu Kaizhi's painted rendition of the poem (291 – 292). The painter of this version clearly used Gu Kaizhi's version for inspiration. Other paintings focus solely on the figure of the Goddess herself, as an enigmatic woman whose emotions are caught between reluctance and desire. For more images, see McCausland's text.
[26] McCausland describes the inability of mortals and immortals to be together (27).

The fact that they are portrayed in their entirety further accentuates the subjugation of the dragon by the immortal, humanoid form: there are no enigmatic factors left in the portrayals of these dragons, no allusions to the dragon as representing a greater cosmic energy. These dragons are fully under the control of the humanoid Goddess, as well as the human painter.

As a juxtaposition of these formalized, highly controlled dragons, the painter includes a virulent black dragon in the sky above the Goddess (Figure 11b). The black dragon hovers just above and out of reach of the Goddess's carriage. This dragon appears to be snarling at the Goddess, seeming quite menacing in comparison to the tamed dragon-ponies pulling the chariot. It is almost as if the black dragon is challenging the chariot to catch up to it. The clouds around the black dragon are defined by undulating movement and have traces of dark, thundercloud features, signifying the rage of the dragon and the imminent storm that will ensue. This dragon is aggressive, not passive and compliant like the others. It raises its claws to the Goddess, as if poised to strike. Perhaps the black dragon served the narrative role of the chastiser of the Goddess for her interlude with a mortal, coming down from above to force the lovers apart from one another.

The Goddess herself is oblivious to the activity around her. Instead, she looks back at a hidden scene, most likely at the image of her lover standing on the shore pining after her (Figure 11c).[27] She seems to be lost in thought and not paying attention to the path ahead of her. The chariot pulls her inexorably forward and away from the sight she is trying to keep locked in her gaze. Perhaps she is looking back at humanity, which is constantly attempting to catch up with her immortal form. She could also be beckoning to

[27] This section of the scroll frames the part of the poem in which the Goddess departs from her lover, Cao Zhi.

the humans with her eyes, further providing incentive for humans to seek longevity and immortality.

From below, two carp-dragons flanking the carriage can be seen jumping upwards from the sea (Figure 11d). These carp-dragons[28], reminiscent of the scholars who ambitiously passed the exams to gain power, look as though they are strenuously leaping towards the Goddess. The presence of these carp-dragons in this painting further emphasizes the futility of pursuing immortality. These carp-dragons are straining voraciously to reach the Goddess, yet she remains impassive and oblivious of their efforts. Thus, the immortality these scholars seek remains forever out of their reach; as shown by these carp-dragons that are portrayed as being caught between the sea and the sky, not quite belonging to either place. This implies that, despite humanity's best efforts, true wisdom and immortality will always be just out of our reach.

This painting portrays and exemplifies the many forms and nuances associated with the Chinese dragon. As outlined above, this anonymous painter depicts both dangerous and docile dragons, containing in one composition the inherent tensions present in the symbolism of the Chinese dragon. The painter includes the cloud imagery as well as placing the dragons over the river, simultaneously highlighting the dragon's association with water as well as its ability to fly. The dragon is both under the control of the humanoid, immortal form, as well as being represented as greater than, and more powerful than the human form. The futile ambitions of humans, in their pursuit of the dragon and immortality, are also represented, through the leaping forms of the carp-

[28] Although the carp-dragons are hard to discern in this portrayal of the *Goddess of Luo*, an earlier example by Gu Kaizhi shows these carp-dragons in greater detail (Figure 12).

dragons. All in all, the only aspect of the Chinese dragon that this painting does not display is the dragon's ability to appear and disappear at will.

As shown in this painting, the Chinese dragon symbolizes both our weaknesses and our strengths as humans. We fall prey to our own ambitions, even willingly risking danger so as to achieve more power. Even though absolute power and control is not possible, the dragon represents the tantalizing suggestion that if we work hard enough, eventually we will emerge victorious. Despite our own weaknesses being what drives these ambitions, our ambitions are also spurred on by our endless capacity to hope as well. We flirt with the concept of danger through the dragon because it represents an existential threat that we can overcome, a feat that we will conquer, or a boundary that we will transcend. Essentially, we perpetuate the image of the dragon so as to hold a mirror up to ourselves and see that we still will always keep fighting the odds, and that there is still potential for growth and change in our collective future.

## Conclusion

The Chinese dragon represents a monster of the human mind, a symbol of positive and negative connotations that reflects the cultures' fascination with the elusiveness of power. The Chinese dragon is a being of many forms, taking shape as a monstrous deity as well as a benign god. Its forms and representations are as versatile as the water cycle with which it is associated. Overall, the Chinese dragon represents human weaknesses and it personifies our basest fears. Yet it also exemplifies the positive aspects of the human spirit, in that the Chinese dragon's existence proves the expansive creativity of the human mind.

The dragon does not exist as a real creature in the world, but its universal representation in cultures around the world suggest that the dragon is very much alive in the consciousness of humanity. The dragon has existed with us for as long as we have harbored fears of predators or an antagonistic "other". It appeared in our artwork as an explanation of phenomenon too vast and complex for us to understand. The dragon has served as the disorder that has allowed humans to define their society's order.

For many centuries, the dragon has been humanity's constant companion, serving as a scapegoat, a source of inspiration, a source of protection, as well as a place for our frustrations to decompress. Essentially, the concept of the dragon has been a cathartic, creative mind game that has occupied our consciousness. Even if we wanted to rid ourselves of the dragon, it has become inexorably tied to our cultural memory and the longevity of humanity itself. The human mind needs dragons, for they represent a vital, if mostly unconscious, part of the human self.

## Image Figures


**Figure 1:** Chen Rong (ca. 1200 – 1266), *Five Dragons*, Southern Song Dynasty, Handscroll, ink on paper, 34.3 cm x 59.6 cm. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City Missouri (Goodfellow 80)

**Figure 2:** Neolithic Jade pendant. Neolithic period (c. 7000 – 1600 B.C.E). Copyrighted to Roy Bates (Bates 25)

**Figure 3:** Neolithic Period, Hongshan Culture. Jade dragon unearthed at Sanxingtala, Ongniud Banner, Inner Mongolia. From "The Dragon in Chinese Art" Exhibit at Palace Museum, Beijing (Xin et al. 11)

**Figure 4:** Neolithic Period. Pig-Dragon-shaped jade ornament unearthed from Niuheliang, Liaoning province. From "The Dragon in Chinese Art" Exhibit at Palace Museum, Beijing (Xin et al. 11)

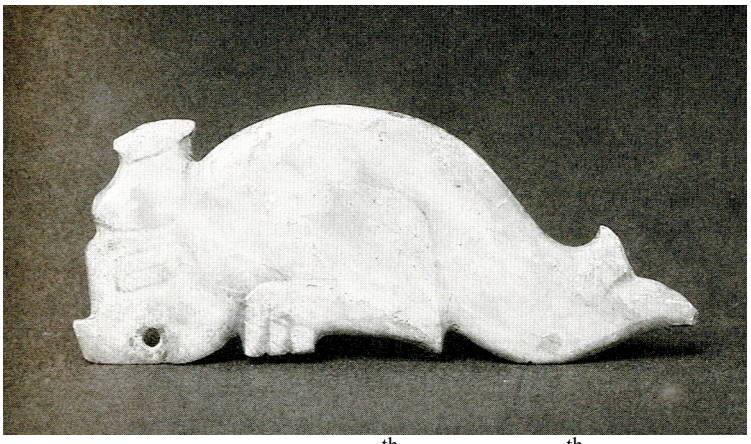

**Figure 5:** Shang Dynasty (16th century – 11th century B.C.E). Jade dragon ornament. Copyrighted by Commercial Press Ltd. (Zhao 183)

**Figure 6:** Chen Rong. *Nine Dragons* (detail). Southern Song Dynasty, date 1244. Handscroll; ink and light color on paper; 46.3 x 1,096.4 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Francis Garner Curtis Fund (Little 23)


**Figure 7:** Wang Zhao. *Picture of a Soaring Dragon*. Ming Dynasty. Silk Painting in ink and color, 167 x 105 cm. From "The Dragon in Chinese Art" Exhibit at Palace Museum, Beijing (Xin et al. 102)

**Figure 8:** Ma Yuan (active c. 1190 – c. 1230). *Immortal Riding a Dragon*. Southern Song Dynasty, early 13th century. Hanging scroll; ink and light colors on silk, 108.1 x 52.6 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei (Little 160)

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**Figure 9:** Anonymous. *Arhats in Line Drawing* (detail). Ming Dynasty. Silk painting in ink and color, 25.5 x 341 cm. From "The Dragon in Chinese Art" Exhibit at Palace Museum, Beijing (Xin et al. 103)

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**Figure 10:** Yuan Gao. *Goddesses in a Garden* (detail). Five Dynasties Period. Silk scroll painting in color, 42.7 x 177.2 cm. From "The Dragon in Chinese Art" Exhibit at the Palace Museum, Beijing (Xin et al. 70)

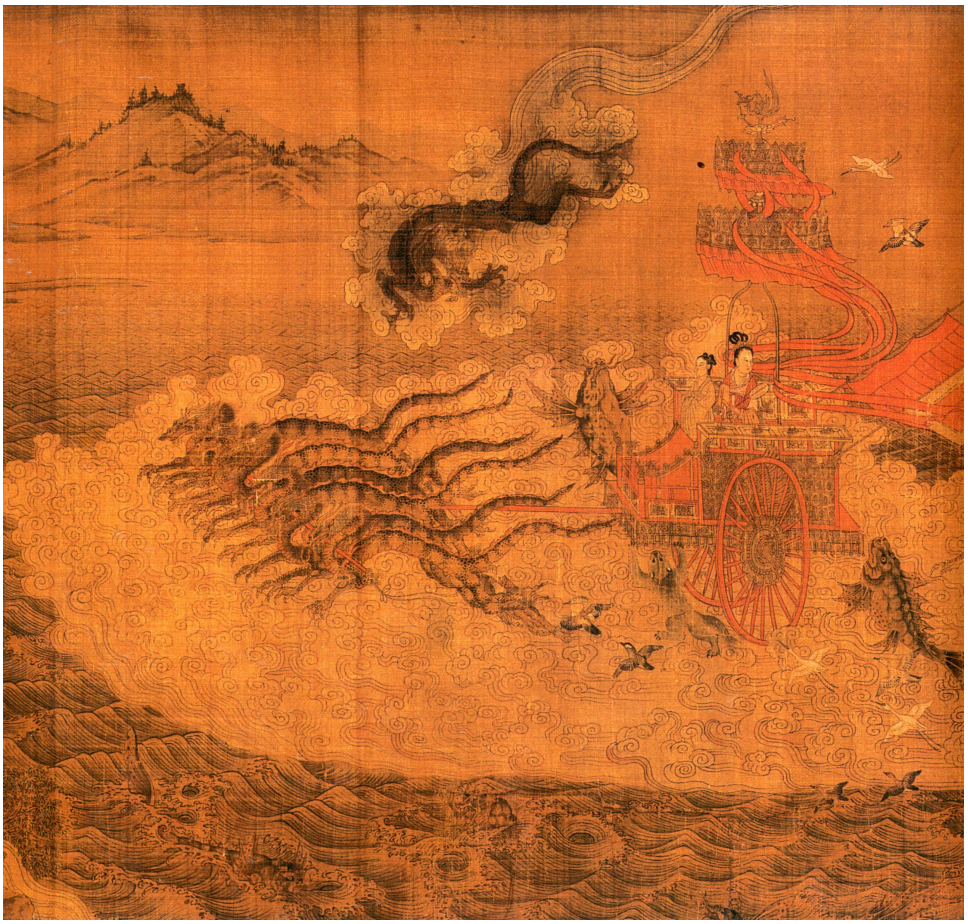

**Figure 11:** Anonymous. *The Goddess of Luo* (detail). Song Dynasty. Silk painting in color. 51.2 x 1,157 cm. From "The Dragon in Chinese Art" Exhibit at the Palace Museum, Beijing (Xin et al. 72)

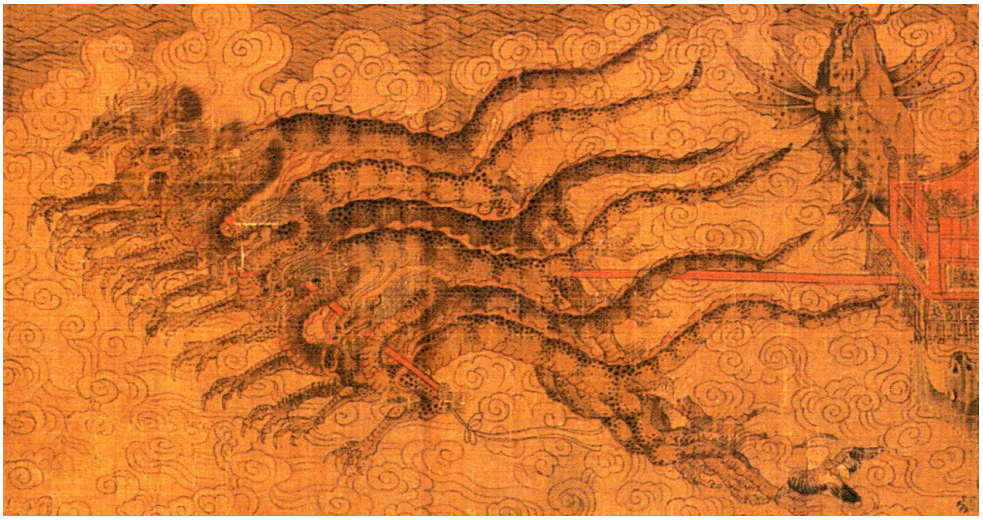

**Figure 11a:** Anonymous. *The Goddess of Luo* (detail of dragons). (Xin et al. 72)

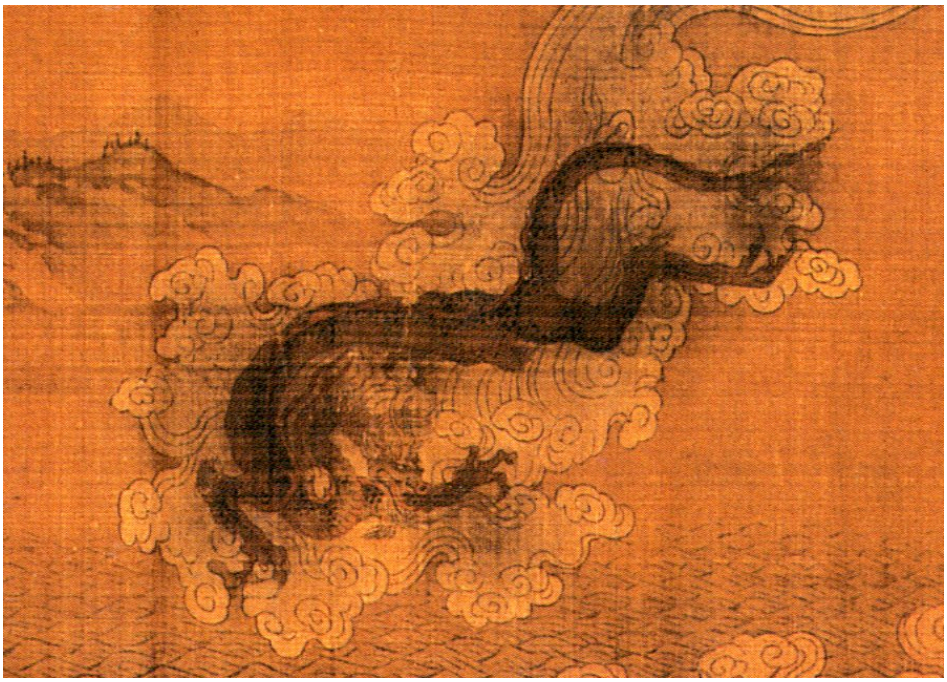

**Figure 11b:** Anonymous. *The Goddess of Luo* (detail of black dragon). (Xin et al. 72)

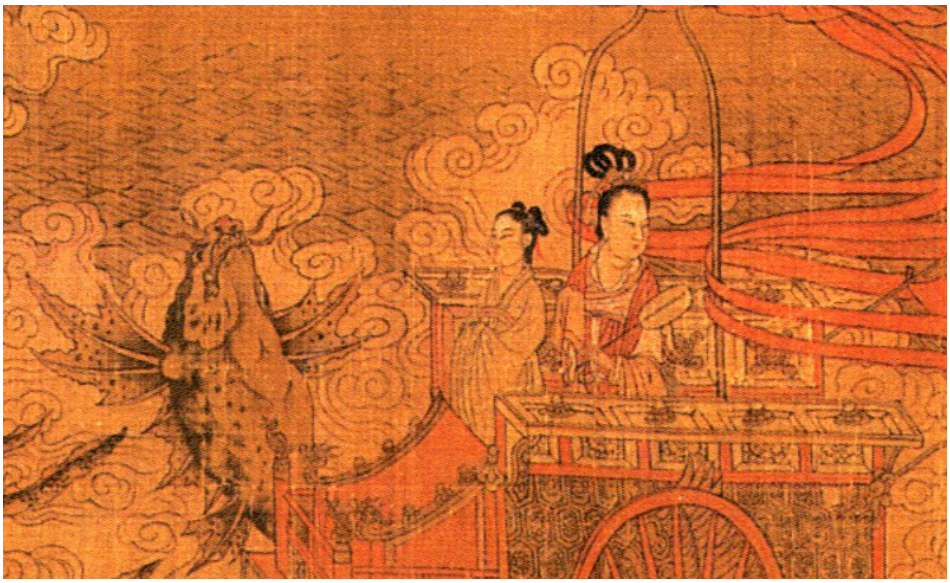

**Figure 11c:** Anonymous. *The Goddess of Luo* (detail of the Goddess). (Xin et al. 72)

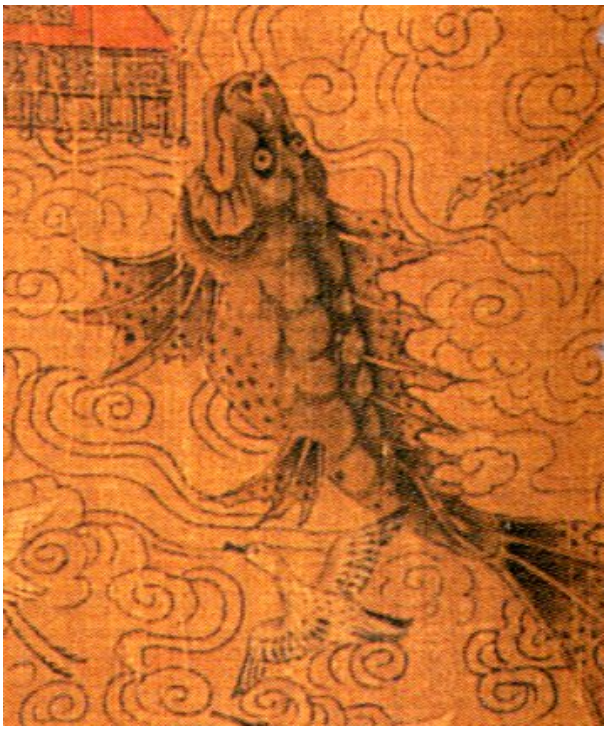

**Figure 11d:** Anonymous. *The Goddess of Luo* (detail of carp-dragon). (Xin et al. 72)

**Figure 12:** Attributed to Gu Kaizhi. *The Goddess of Luo* (detail of carp-dragon). Jin Dynasty. Silk painting in color. 21.1 cm x 578.8 cm. From "The Dragon in Chinese Art" Exhibit at Palace Museum, Beijing (Xin et al. 55)

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